

*Helping  
you to help  
your child*

# How to Support Your Child When Someone Dies

Simple, actionable ideas for parents, carers  
and other supporting adults



You're not alone if you feel lost about how to help your child in their grief

## Introduction

It can be hard to know how to help a child when someone dies, so in this guide I've shared ideas to help you support your child through loss and bereavement.

Some pages in this guide are designed to be printable and copiable; feel free to copy, use and share them.

Cherry-pick the ideas that you think might work for you and give them a go. You can always revisit others later if you need to.

If you're grieving too, these ideas may help you as well and doing them alongside your child can help you both.

Good luck!

*Pooky x*

# Say it Simply

There is a lot of adult language that surrounds death and dying that is designed to protect, but can often confuse.

Children, especially younger children and children with special or additional needs, need to hear the truth plainly so that they can fully understand it and begin to process it.

Whilst it can feel harsh, and blunt at first, straight-talking when it comes to death also shows our children that this is not a topic to be scared of and it's okay to talk about it.



## More helpful

- X has died
- X is dead
- X is dying

## Less helpful

- Passed on
- Gone away
- Resting in peace

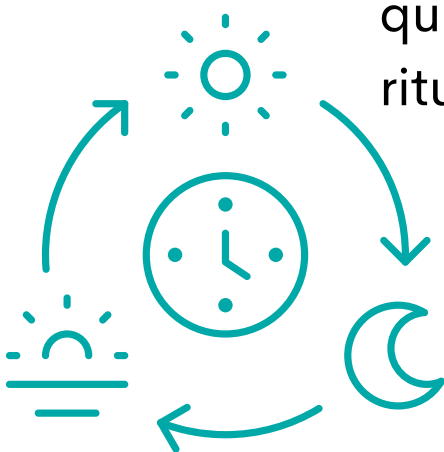
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## Make their World Predictable

The death of someone they love, can make a child's world feel scary, unpredictable and out of control. We can help by making as much as possible in their world predictable and consistent.

Familiar faces, spaces and routines will bring comfort and familiarity and can feel deeply reassuring for your child in challenging times.

When someone dies, it's normal for many things to change suddenly. Try to look for what can stay the same and communicate this clearly with your child. Look too to quickly establish new rules, routines and rituals where needed.



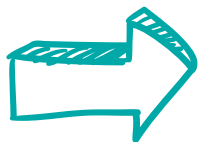
# Validate ALL Feelings

Many children are naturally very good at processing big feelings around death; much better than adults who've been conditioned to grieve in the ways society tells us are right.

As such, notice that your child is feeling a big range of different feelings and encourage this. It is normal and healthy not to feel sad all the time, your child may move quickly between different feelings and may be laughing one minute and crying the next.

ALL feelings are valid and children need not to inadvertently learn from adults that only sadness is acceptable now. Giving themselves a break from grief is important too and it's especially healthy if we can move to a place where we remember the person who died with a smile on our face as we revisit happy memories.

*Next up are a bunch of ideas to help your child explore their feelings*



# Exploring Feelings about Death

*Start writing - write whatever comes into your head*

*Draw how you feel - let go and just keep drawing*

*Talk about it to a person or a pet*

*Imagine how your favourite character would feel in your shoes right now*

**This might help me**

*Make a playlist of songs that sound how you feel*

*Journal using the prompts: 'I am.. I feel.. I hope.. I wish...'*

*Notice and name your feelings - try not to judge them*

*Sing*

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## Accept Anger

Your child will experience all sorts of feelings, and one they may feel quite strongly is anger. We need to acknowledge and help our child accept this anger which might otherwise be repressed or hidden for fear of it being inappropriate.

Anger needs to be heard, otherwise, it tends to turn to poison that either hurts us inside or spills out at times we can't control and hurts others.

You could say:

I feel angry too.  
It's very hard  
and it feels very  
unfair right now.

It's okay to be  
angry. Would you  
like to  
talk/draw/write  
about it?

# Pick-Me-Up Prompt

If your child is trying to re-engage with normal daily activities such as going to school, it is to be expected that every now and then they may feel overwhelmed with their feelings.

Plan ahead for this and consider, with your child, what would be most helpful in this situation. You could create a crib sheet, or prompt card for your child to carry or share with trusted adults (there's an example on the next page).

Key questions to consider with your child are:

 *What helps?*

 *What is unhelpful?*

 *Who needs to know?*





Name:

# Tricky Moments Plan

If I'm feeling overwhelmed you might notice

**WARNING SIGNS**

These things sometimes help me

**WHAT HELPS**

Please don't do or say these things as they can make it feel worse

**PLEASE DON'T**

If these things don't help, please support me to

**WHAT NEXT**

# Tricky Moments Plan Supporting Notes

It can help to plan ahead for tricky moments and consider what trusted adults can do to help in this situation. Having a clear plan in place can often prevent things from escalating.

## Warning Signs

List here the signs that a supporting adult might be able to notice that might indicate that you are needing some support. Perhaps you become very quiet or seem angry or you stop answering questions in class.

You could also develop a signal or sign to show you need help, e.g. 'If I put my red pen on the table it means I need some help please.'

## What helps

Here, you list the different things that help you in these moments. They might be things you can do for yourself or things that other people can support with. Consider what's helped in the past and try to list a few things for different situations.

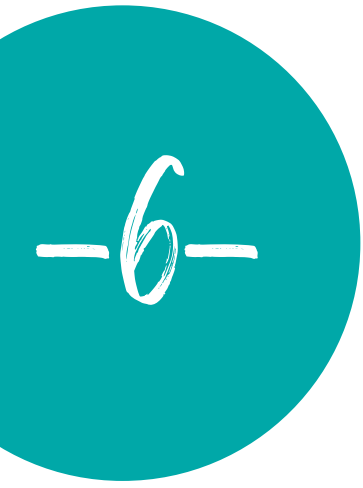
Notice what helps more and what helps less and alter this section over time to reflect that.

## Please don't

If there's anything that people sometimes do or say that makes you feel worse, note it here. Sometimes people are trying to help and they get it wrong; you can help them avoid that.

## What next

Write here about the backup plan if the ideas above don't help. Is there somewhere or someone you can go to if you need further support?



## Generate Joy

Joy and laughter can provide important respite from more challenging feelings and sometimes children feel that they are not allowed to be happy after someone has died.

Help them to understand they are allowed to feel every kind of feeling by thinking with them about the little moments in the day or week that might bring a little bit of happiness and exploring ways to do more of those things.

Notice the happy moments and try to encourage them and, if you can, try to join in sometimes too. You can be happy whilst remembering the person who died, but it is also totally okay to completely take a break from thinking about them for a little while and enjoy something else entirely.



# Cathartic Crying

It's okay to laugh and it's okay to cry too. One of the things that often gets praised at these times is 'being strong' but sometimes we don't feel strong, we just want to cry and cry and cry, and that's okay.

Having a good cry is a very natural and healthy way of working through some of the BIG feelings that we experience when someone dies.

It is also okay for you to cry with your child. Role modelling of this healthy and natural response to grief is a brilliant thing for children to experience with adults they trust as it gives them permission to cry too.

You can talk about crying and how it makes you feel better, you might even decide to have a cry together and snuggle up with tears and tissues. You can also encourage tears that feel needed by doing things like looking at photos or playing songs that remind you of the person who died.





# Working with Worries

When someone dies, children often have a LOT of worries that they carry with them. One of the 4Ss may help:

*- Share it -*

Talk, write or draw about your worries. Get them out of your head and into the world.

*- Shelf it -*

If now is not a good time for exploring a worry, shelf it for later - make an appointment with worry.

*- Shout it -*

Sometimes we need to run, jump, shout or scream to try and get rid of the fizzing, bubbling worry feelings.

*- Shed it -*

Some worries are not yours to carry. Pass adult worries onto an adult to worry about. It's their job!

# What Was Left Unsaid?

There are often things we want to tell the person who has died, but it feels too late. These might be things we had been meaning to tell them when they were still alive, or maybe they are new things that we would really like to share with them.

These things are better said than unsaid, so it might be helpful for your child to write to or talk to the person who has died and imagine the response they need - or you might support with this too.

So long as it doesn't get in the way of connecting with the living, it's okay to keep talking to the dead long after they've gone. This can provide great comfort and often helps us to unpick our worries and dilemmas.

## *You could*

- Write them a letter
- Talk to their picture
- Play a song they liked and imagine them talking to you





## Keep and Make Memories

Memories are precious ways of keeping someone alive in spirit even after they have died. Collecting and treasuring them can be helpful for children who are grieving.

You could:

Make a scrapbook  
of memories

Fill a box  
with  
momentos

Write a journal using  
grief or memory  
prompts

Voice  
record  
special  
moments

Fill a jar with  
memory notes

Paint pebbles with memories and  
put them in special places

# Journal Prompts *Grief & Memories*

Write about a happy memory of your time together

Write about a time you laughed together

Write about the day they died and how you found out

Write a letter to them with the things you wish you'd said

Write a kind letter to you, from them

Write about the advice they used to give you

Make a list of ten things you both loved

Write a list of five things that annoyed you both

Draw or write about their hands

What I most miss about X is...

If X was here, they would tell me...

I always think of X when...



# Memory Jar Notes to Print and Write

We laughed when...

We cried when...

Our favourite film was

Our favourite song was

Because...

Because...

A place we loved to go

Our favourite food

First memory of you

Last memory of you

We got angry when..

We loved it when...

# Works Best When

It's important you find the way that works best for you and your child, but a few things that can really help include:

Children need human, not hero, role models. Be proudly imperfect

## - Be Human -

You're grieving too and you're a role model for your child. You don't need to be perfect, or strong, instead role model raw, human, imperfect grieving with lots of muddling through and cuddles and crying if that helps you.

## - Trust the Process -

Given the space and time it needs, for most people grief is a very natural process that we'll work through in stages. It can't be ignored or hurried, or it will come back to haunt you.

## - Open & Honest -

Try to have open and honest conversations with your child about what is helpful and unhelpful to them, and to you too.

Try to remove all judgement and approach these conversations with curiosity. We all need different things, and that's okay.

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- Thank You! -

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Pooky x

